

NEW TRENDS AND CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF BANGLADESHI MIGRATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

Migration is both a symptom and a defining feature of globalization. If we view globalization as an historical process in the making for centuries rather than a post-World War II economic grid connecting the world, we will recognize the significance of the movement of people along with the movement of capital as a key element in the processes of globalization. The transatlantic slave trade, indentured labor system, enforced or “encouraged” systems of population movement during the colonial rule constitute important episodes in the making of a globalized world with implications for multiculturalism and identity politics today. It is hard to separate or ignore the historical antecedence if we want a clearer understanding of contemporary migrations be it temporary or contract labor migration or the migration of the aspiring and socially mobile middle classes.

Although migration has a long history in Bangladesh, research on migration has lagged behind. Some studies are now appearing in the last few decades on Bangladeshi migration, especially since the large-scale migration of Bangladeshi workers to the Gulf following the oil boom in the 1970s. Since Bangladesh’s independence, a growing number of researches followed the phenomena of rural to urban migration covering their settlement patterns in the urban squatters. This paper does not include the internal migration in Bangladesh. It also does not cover the recent phenomenon of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in Bangladesh. Geographical, economic, and some times, political factors cause many inhabitants of Bangladesh migrants in their own country. Since this comes under the scope of internal migration, we would not deal with it here. This paper traces the history of Bangladeshi international migration with special emphasis on the recent trends of both labor migration to the Middle East and Southeast Asia and Middle Class migration to North America, Australia and other developed countries. As host countries are increasingly becoming wary of the flow of migrations and imposing restrictions the problem of undocumented migration is surfacing in many countries. In updating the recent trends of migration the paper deals with human trafficking which is becoming a growing menace in Bangladesh.

In the present paper we will define migration as movement of people – families or single persons – from one residence to another either by free will or under compulsion. We need a broad definition of migration so as to capture the movement of people who changed their residence for all kinds of reasons from purely economic compulsions to the needs of changing political landscapes. According to a prominent social scientist, migration is, broadly, a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence (Lee, 1969:285). As this paper will demonstrate that we need an inclusive definition of migration to capture the diverse forms of population movement from the region presently called Bangladesh which emerged as an independent state in 1971. The

phenomenon of migration has many forms ranging from forced versus voluntary, elite or middle class versus working class, male versus female, international versus internal, and so on. In recent years, human trafficking has emerged as a new form of illegal slavery. This needs to be incorporated into the discussion of migration.

Migration from the geopolitical entity called Bangladesh has a long history. History of migration remains inadequately recorded but movement of people from the region can be traced back to earlier times. The port of Chittagong was the point of entry for Arab ships that brought traders as well as the preachers of new religion, Islam thus exposing the local people to the very idea of migration. Many inhabitants of the region following the precepts of their religion, Islam went to Mecca for pilgrimage. Some returned home to tell the stories of their often perilous mission, others chose to stay back in the holy land until their death which was believed to be auspicious. During the British rule, thanks to the formation of an empire, many residents of Bengal (the historical name of Bangladesh) moved to various parts of India and Burma. There is a Bengali community and a Bengali neighborhood in Myanmar or Burma. Many Bengalis went there in search of fortune in business. Others went to do clerical work. One of the famous Bengali writers, Sarat Chatterjee born in 1876 ended up in Rangoon as a clerk in a government office in 1903. His sojourn to Burma was immortalized in his various novels, most notably, his autobiographical novel *Srikanta*.

Burma was annexed by the British India in three successive wars starting in 1824-26 and the last one in 1885-6. However, with the annexation of the lower Burma Indian migration grew appreciably since 1852. In some sense Rangoon grew up as an Indian city (Chakravarti, 1971:6-7). Bengali migration, especially from the neighbouring Chittagong district, was significant. According to the 1931 census, there were a total of 48,682 Bengali males and 16,529 Bengali females. There were also a total of 163,912 men from Chittagong and 88,240 women from Chittagong. (Chakravarti, 1971:191 Appendix). The fact that in the census, people from Chittagong were categorized separately tells us something of the special status and the historical roots of migration from Chittagong.

A term “probashi Banagalee” came in vogue connoting Bengali people away from home in the larger India. Although the Bengali word “Probash” literally means foreign residence, it signified places outside of home or birth place. The Bengali word “desh” means country, home, place of birth, place of belonging all at the same time. Its opposite “bidesh” means not only foreign but the opposites of all of the above. “Desh” is highly variable. For someone who was born in Barisal, a district of Bangladesh, while in Dhaka, he will claim that his “desh” is Barisal. The same person while in Singapore will claim that his “desh” is Bangladesh to a Singaporean and “Barisal” to a fellow Bangladeshi.

As during the British rule, Bengalis began to migrate to prosperous Indian cities. People from East Bengal when they could afford migrated to Calcutta, the capital of British India until 1857 to which the rest Bengal was nothing more than a hinterland. This could also be counted as some form of migration. In this instance rural to urban migration. The paper will deal with mostly international migration. But once we look at the issue historically, what was once nothing more than movement of people within a country (India), or say, a region (Bengal) can now be viewed as international migration. Since the region was divided into two states, namely India and Pakistan, the present Bangladesh or the larger Muslim dominated part became East Pakistan in 1947. And

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when Bangladesh was born out of a bloody war of liberation in 1971 what was known as East Pakistan became Bangladesh.

The partition of the Indian subcontinent saw a huge movement of population in the region. Ostensibly, the partition was based on religion. The Hindu majority regions became part of India and the Muslim dominated regions were supposed to be parts of Pakistan which explains the anomalous creation of Pakistan comprising of two territories separated by more than 1,200 miles with India in between. The partition also led to huge migration which began in July 1947 as soon as the Indian Independence Act was made known. Many Hindus and Sikhs from the territories that comprised Pakistan left their homelands to go to India and tens of thousands of Muslims from India migrated to Pakistan. The huge number of people moved under the worst of circumstances. Brutality was writ larger everywhere; trains filled with dead bodies and mutilated bodies made those passages. It would be important to recount the tragedy of massive forced and semi-forced migration at this point. These migrants were clearly the victims of politics and rewriting of history which led to rewriting of geography. According to ILO:

“The immediate – and tragic – result of this decision to partition the country was a huge two-way exodus of minority groups seeking to join their co-religionists on the other side of the frontier. These movements had in fact begun even before the partition took place. During the early months of 1947 many hundreds of thousands of Hindus from the Punjab and the Northwest Provinces had left their homes, while a flight of Moslems had also taken place to the west during the period immediately preceding independence. The two-way movement, however, did not reach its peak until after independence when for months on end a horde of refugees poured in both directions, swamping all available means of transport or traveling on foot in small groups or in long straggling columns. By the end of 1948 Pakistan had received 6.7 million refugees and India approximately the same number. The movements went on for a long time afterwards, since for Pakistan as a whole the number of refugees rose from 7.2 million at the 1951 census to 8.4 million at the 1957 census while in India their number increased from 7.3 million to 8.8 million between the same dates” (ILO, 1959:109).

The partition and the justification it was based on, in retrospect, seems dubious. As the author Salman Rushdie writes: “... the famous moth-eaten partition that chopped up the old country and handed Al-Lah a few insect-nibbled slices of it, some dusty western acres and jungly eastern swamps that the ungodly were happy to do without.” (Rushdie, 1983:61)

II. MIGRATION DURING COLONIAL PERIOD

The British empire facilitated movement of people with improved communication. Railways in India which was hailed by Karl Marx as the first true social revolution facilitated movement of people. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 also shortened the travel time between India and Britain. Despite the sanctions imposed by Hinduism on migration, Hindu elites began to undertake sea voyages for which some of them such as Michael Madhushudon Datta (1824-1873), a poet of great distinction, had to expiate upon return from England to his motherland.

In the early part of the twentieth century as the British empire expanded, natives of India who by then acquired some English education and work experience in the bureaucracy were in demand. Some of the Indians were shipped to Africa where they

helped set up the new Railway system, or the working class were transshipped to Malaya to work in the rubber plantation or the mining industries. Other Indians went as far as the West Indies. During the colonial phase of migration largely at the instance of the British Empire, though the Bengalis were not the major groups, they were represented. In Malaya, for example, a group of Bengali medical doctors were brought in to provide medical services to the workers in the rubber plantation.

The history of labor migration from Bangladesh needs to be embedded into the larger history of labor migration from India. As a result for a demand for labor, in 1838, British Guiana was the first Caribbean territory to receive indentured Indians, several other Caribbean colonies began importing Indian labour in following years. Between 1838 and 1917, more than half a million Indians were brought to the Caribbean. (Vertovec, 1995:57). One has to consider not only the oppressive nature of the indentured labour system which was a replacement of slavery only in theory, in practice the legacy remained. One could even suggest that human trafficking continues to carry the legacy into the twenty first century. According to Vertovec, "So-called 'push factors' probably had more to do with migrants' decisions to indenture themselves abroad than did 'pull' factors of promised opportunities. In the second half of the nineteenth century, throughout India peasants faced famines and a massive disruption to livelihoods with the demise of traditional industries, relocated local economies, new demands of cash payments for upwardly spiraling rents, a high incidence of evictions, and widespread unemployment" (Vertovec, 1995:59). System of indenture survived from 1830 to 1916. Migration to other parts of the British empire such as Mauritius, Natal and Fiji was part of a global process of labor migration from India which began after the abolition of slavery. During this period, the demand for a cheap, unskilled and pliant labour force in colonies for sugar production increased. (Thiara, 1995:63).

In the shipment of the labour migration Calcutta remained the main 'coolie catchment' center and port of embarkation until 1870 after which the recruiters cast their nets towards the United Provinces and Bihar. This being the case, it was possible that some if not the majority of the migrants were Bengalis. On this subject we have little historical evidence as yet The historical records on migration on the whole is patchy. However, there is a consensus among historians that the demand for labourers was created with the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833. Indentured laborers from India filled this gap. Indian laborers went to work in the plantations in Mauritius, British Guyana, Fiji, Sri Lanka and Malaya in the late nineteenth century (*The Cambridge Encyclopedia*, 1989). Although Indians from the southern regions dominated, it may be a possible that in the early part of the twentieth century Bengalis were part of the Indian overseas work force. For example, some Bengalis from Sylhet came to Singapore during the World War II.

Many working class Bangladeshis towards the end of the British Raj found jobs in the shipping industry as sailors some of them took refuge in England. I met one girl in Canada whose grandfather jumped ship and ended in Guyana. Her ancestral home was Noakhali, Bangladesh. With passage of time her family name was modified into "Holder" which was probably "Hawlder", a common family name in Bangladesh. Later on in the post World War II period, when Britain was in short supply of laborers they brought many Bengalis from Sylhet which once accounted for nearly 90% of the Bangladeshis in England. Katy Gardner has looked into the migration of the Sylhetis to London. London became the metropolis of the people of Sylhet.

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According to Gardner: "Sylhet's experience of overseas migration spans many generations. Since the 1930s and 1940s, with the movement of single men to Britain, small pockets of the district have been profoundly affected by migration....Men were employed by British ship companies from the nineteenth century onwards, invariably to perform the most unpleasant tasks on board....Although work on the ships was punishing, profits were considerable by village standards. One year's work in a ship's engine room might enable a man to buy land or build a new house. Many seamen did not confine themselves to seas, but jumped ship and sought their fortune on dry land" (Gardner, 1999:489). Some of the early South Asian men who came to Britain married local English women. References of some of these cases are found in a nineteenth century study by Henry Mayhew titled *London Labour and the London Poor* published in 1861 (http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/histories/asian/growing_up/growing_up.htm).

Both Sylhet and Chittagong districts continue to play an important role in the migration of Bangladeshis. The district of Noakhali is also represented heavily as a source of migration. One of the prominent Muslim Bengali writers, Syed Mujtaba Ali hailed from Sylhet. Born in 1904, Syed Mujtaba Ali went to pre World War II Germany to study German literature. A foremost linguist, Ali's writings referred to Bengalis in Berlin at that time. As a travel writer, Ali captured not only the tales of his own peripatetic life but also provided a window on the smatterings of Bengali Middle Class overseas migration.

During the Pakistan period a good deal of migration took place between East and West Pakistan. Inter-wing relationship was effectively promoted by the government to build solidarity. Many Bangladeshi tasted migration and subsequently moved to other countries. During the liberation war an estimated 9 million people took refuge in Indian states bordering Bangladesh. Although, a small number of them remained in India, the vast majority returned to the newly independent Bangladesh. The return was not only a logistic nightmare, it put an enormous pressure on the resources and abilities of a newly set up administration (Khondker, 1995).

Historical research on the long distance migration reveals that for most migrants, migration was a final relocation of residence. Even many of the indentured laborers chose to stay back in distant lands and climes. However, one of the features of international migration in the contemporary world has been the predominance of temporary or short-term (or fixed-term) migration as workers go overseas on temporary employment. The organized recruitment of temporary migrant workers began in the various parts of the World mainly after the end of Second World War¹ (Castles and

¹ There are several terms that are used to indicate temporary labor migration in the various parts of the World. For example, the term '*guest workers*' is frequently used to refer to Europe's temporary labor migration system'. *Seasonal workers* are found throughout the world and are employed in such activities as agricultural work, the tourist industry, etc.; Switzerland, Venezuela, France and the USA are among the largest users of such labor. *Circular workers* refer to the usually self-initiating journey in search of working neighboring states undertaken by many African and Latin American migrants. Finally, *contract workers* denote labor arrangements which are usually for a finite duration and which occurs within legal parameters involving both the country of origin and the country of destination. Labor migration to the oil-producing Gulf States, East and Southeast Asian countries and the South African labor migration system are the largest examples of this type of labor arrangement. Names of some temporary foreign worker programs are the *Bracero Program* (United States, 1942-1964), the *Gastarbeiter Program* (Germany, 1955-1973), the *H-1B Program* (United States, 1952-), the *Auslaenderausweis B Program* (Switzerland), the *Kafala - Visa 18 Program* (Kuwait, 1973-), and the

Miller, 1998; Skeldon, 1997). In the last several decades, rapid changes in the flow and ebb of labor migration have followed the spectacular growth and slow down of East and Southeast Asian economies. The phenomenal rise of migration from and within Asia has been aided by changes in the immigration policies of the major settler societies and political involvement of external powers in Asian affairs. All these changes have produced different types of international migration in Asia. For example, Roland Skeldon (1992) has identified five types of migration systems within and from East and Southeast Asian region: the settler migration system, the student migration system, the contract labor migration system, the skilled labor migration system; and refugee movements². However, in the case of the international movements within the Asian region, it is primarily a labor system of migration that is developing (Skeldon, 1992:6).

The legacy of colonialism made the U.K. the traditional destination of Bangladeshi migrants. In the post-independence period a combination of push and pull factors created a number of new destinations for the young Bangladeshis, mostly from the middle class background, who “wanted to see the world” as one of them stated in an interview. Tens of thousands of Bangladeshis went to the USA and Canada in North America and a host of European countries such as Germany, France, Holland, Italy, and Sweden. Taking advantage of the Cold War inspired rules of granting refugee status to anyone who crossed over from the Socialist East Europe to the West Germany; many Bangladeshis went to Poland and East Germany and then crossed into West Germany. Although some Bangladeshis were genuinely political refugees, many were not. Yet, they were lured by the generous welfare provisions in countries such as Holland or Sweden. (At the time of revising this paper in late February, 2004, 26,000 political asylum seekers in Holland have been turned down their appeal by the court and are awaiting repatriation to their native countries. A number of Bangladeshis are likely to be included as well). A news report in December 2003 showed a group of young Bangladeshis were barred from traveling to France as they were about to board a flight out of Bolivia. These Bangladeshis were working in a provincial town in Bolivia. Bangladeshis at the beginning of the new millennium has been scattered all over the world.

With rapid economic growth and a demand for professionals and workers, Asian growth economies such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Brunei too attracted a large number of Bangladeshis. A large number of poor Bangladeshis ended up in Pakistan and India mainly working as domestic servants or in the informal sectors of the economy. An increasing number of migrants are adopting illegal, informal and clandestine channels for migration. (Islam, 1995:360).

There are two major destinations for Asian temporary labor migrants – Middle East and East and South East Asia. The first flow of temporary labor migration in Asia was followed by the oil price hike during the 1970s and its consequence of massive transfer of wealth to the oil-rich countries of the Middle East. Over time, destinations have become more varied, although the Middle East still remains the major magnet of migrants (Hugo, 1996). Since the mid-1980s, demand for temporary migrants grew remarkably in East and Southeast Asian countries. Some commentators have already named this region the ‘newest international migration system’ or the ‘newest migratory pole’ (Salt, 1992). The rise of temporary labor migration in Asia is mainly attributed to

Work Permit P, Q, R program in Singapore (see for details, Castles, 1995, 1997; Papademetriou and Martin, 1991; Ruhs 2002, Ruhs and Chang, 2002)

² Several migration scholars have offered different typologies of migrants and of migration, for details, see Appleyard, 1989; Skeldon, 1992; Castles, 1998; Petersen, 1958; Krishnan and Odynak, 1987.

the developments in the oil-rich countries of the Middle East and economic development in East and Southeast Asia (Martin, 2001).

A number of writers have examined the various factors that explain the mobility of workers within Asia (see Abella, 1990, 2000; Appleyard, 1988; Athukorala, 1993; Castles 2001; Athukorala and Manning 1999; Skeldon, 1999, 1992; Hugo, 1998). The most important factor is the wage-differentials and their awareness of this differential wage. Philip L. Martin (2001) has identified four factors that are likely to increase labor migration in East and Southeast Asia in coming years. One of the most important factors is widening wage differentials within the region that is contributing to migration pressures. Another factor likely to increase Asian labor migration is economic shifts within the region – from manufacturing economy to service economy. A third factor is cultural shifts. Better-educated youth are increasingly shunning the so called 3D jobs – jobs that are dirty, dangerous, and difficult. As a result, migrant workers find a space for themselves in the host economy. Other factors include migration organization and the network within the migrant communities. As long as the economic disparity remains and the high unemployment in countries such as Bangladesh remain unchanged, temporary labor migrants are going to increase in this region in the years to come.

Bangladeshi migrants have joined in the temporary labor migration system of East and South-East Asia since the commencement of the large scale labor migration in the late 1980s³. However, the outflow of migrant workers increased remarkably in the early 1990s. Presently, there are about 400,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers in this region⁴. Among the major labor-receiving countries in this region (Table 1), Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Brunei and Japan are hosts of a large number of documented and undocumented⁵ Bangladeshi migrants. A small number of them are also seen in Hong Kong and Thailand. Despite more than one decade of migration experience, we know very little about the trends and patterns of Bangladeshi labor migration to these comparatively new destinations of East and Southeast Asia. There is also a dearth of research on the experiences of foreign workers in general and Bangladeshi migrant workers in particular under different ‘temporary foreign worker programs’ (e.g. work-permit, trainee) in various host countries in this region.

³ This paper mainly discusses Bangladeshi labor migration to the countries of East and Southeast Asia. A detailed description of international labor migration in Asia is not adequately provided in this paper. For details about international labor migration in East and Southeast Asia, please see Abella, 1990, 2000; Debrah, 2002, Skeldon, 1997, 1999, 1992, 2001; Athukorala and Manning, 1999; Castles and Miller, 1998; Hugo, 1998; Battistella and Asis, 1998; 2003; Kritiz et al. 1992; Martin, 1991; Stahl, 2001; Stahl and Appleyard, 1992; Chan and Abdullah, 1999; Siddique (ed.), 2001; Massey et al. 1998; Appleyard, 1991; Wickramasekara, 2000.

⁴ We use different sources to estimate this figure. Major sources are *Asian Migration Atlas*, different issues of *Asian Migration News*, Annual reports of *OECD*, *BMET* (Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training), *Labor News* (Bangladesh), Ministry of Justice (Korea), Ministry of Justice (Japan), and personal observation in these countries. This figure includes both documented and undocumented Bangladeshi migrants in East and Southeast Asian Countries. A country-wise presentation of total Bangladeshi workers is given later under country cases.

⁵ We use the terms ‘undocumented migration’, ‘illegal migration’ and ‘unauthorized migration’ interchangeably throughout the paper. However, the term ‘illegal’ serves to criminalize migrants (Battistella and Asis, 2003).

TABLE 1. Major Host and Guest Countries in East and Southeast Asia

Mainly Emigration	Mainly Immigration	Both Immigration and Emigration
Philippines, Bangladesh,	Japan, South Korea,	Malaysia, Thailand
India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia,	Taiwan, Hong Kong	
Viet Nam, China, Pakistan,	Singapore, Brunei	
Myanmar, Cambodia		

III. PUSH FACTOR IN MIGRATION

Bangladesh has one of the highest population densities in the world. Over 140 million people live in a land of 56,000 square miles. A sluggish economy and high unemployment make it a natural labor-exporting country. According to some available estimates, the total cumulative figure for Bangladeshi migrants overseas until March, 2000 is approximately 3 million (calculated from, Siddiqui, 2001: 30). The information generated by the BMET⁶ related only to the outflow of nationals; there is no system of collecting information on the number of those returning home. Aforementioned cumulative figure represents about 4 percent of the labor force, which is significant but in no way an overwhelmingly large number. Usually, about 200,000 Bangladeshis migrate annually for overseas employment (*Asian Migration News*, 15 June 2003). Most of the migrants are located in the Middle East. A recent report on the stock of Bangladeshi workers reveals that there are 1,725,395 Bangladeshi workers in Middle East (*The Daily Jugantor*, 29 January 2003).

Table 2 presents the trends of Bangladeshi labor migration overseas. The data suggests that the annual flow of migrants peaked in 1997 with 381,077 dropping to 34,230 in 2000. It appears to have gone up again in recent years. Saudi Arabia is the largest employer of Bangladeshi migrant workers. From 1976 to February 2001 altogether 3,166,888 Bangladeshis migrated for overseas employment. Of this figure, 1,454,645 persons went to Saudi Arabia during this period. Malaysia was the second largest employer of Bangladeshi migrant workers. Due to financial crisis in 1997 the number of Bangladeshis migrating to Malaysia through legal channel fell drastically in 1998. However, if one counts the total number of migrants from 1976 to January 2001, Malaysia still stands in the second position among the Bangladeshi labor importing countries (405,736). Manpower export to Korea and Singapore was only 11,760 and 87,583 until January 2001⁷. As we have mentioned earlier, BMET data may not be a reliable source to estimate the actual number of migrants overseas. The fluctuation of migration indicates the sensitivity of the demand factors of cheap labor internationally.

⁶ Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), government body, is in charge to collect the data on migrant workers.

⁷ Official data suggests that yearly migration for Singapore crossed 1000 mark after 1995 and it was never more than 10,000 with exceptions in 1997, 1998 and 2000. However, source in Singapore suggests that every year more than 30,000 Bangladeshi workers come to Singapore with semi-skilled and unskilled status for joining in construction and shipbuilding and manufacturing sectors (*The Straits Times*, 18 December 1999 "The Journey of Hope").

TABLE 2. Migration by Country of Employment (1976 – 2001 January February)

Year	K.S.A	Kuwait	UAE	Qatar	Iraq	Libya	Bahrain	Oman	Malaysia	Korea	Singapore	Others*	Total	Remittances**
1976	217	643	1,989	1,221	587	173	335	113				809	6,087	24
1977	1,379	1,315	5,819	2,262	1,238	718	870	1,492				632	15,725	83
1978	3,212	2,243	7,512	1,303	1,454	2,394	762	2,877	23			1,029	22,809	107
1979	6,476	2,298	5,069	1,383	2,363	1,969	827	3,777			110	223	24,495	172
1980	8,695	3,687	4,847	1,455	1,927	2,976	1,351	4,745	3		385	2	30,073	301
1981	13,384	5,464	6,418	2,268	13,153	4,162	1,392	7,352			1,083	1,111	55,787	305
1982	16,294	7,244	6,863	6,252	12,898	2,071	2,037	8,248			331	524	62,762	491
1983	12,928	10,283	6,615	7,556	4,932	2,209	2,473	11,110	23		178	913	59,220	628
1984	20,399	5,627	5,185	2,726	4,701	3,386	2,300	10,448			718	1,224	56,714	500
1985	37,133	7,384	8,336	4,751	5,051	1,514	2,965	9,218			792	550	77,694	500
1986	27,235	10,286	8,790	4,847	4,728	3,111	2,597	6,255	53		25	254	68,658	576
1987	39,292	9,559	9,953	5,889	3,847	2,271	2,055	440				711	74,017	748
1988	27,622	6,524	13,437	7,390	4,191	2,759	3,268	2,219	2			709	68,121	764
1989	39,949	12,404	15,184	8,462	2,573	1,609	4,830	15,429	401		229	654	101,724	758
1990	57,486	5,957	8,307	7,672	2,700	471	4,563	13,980	1,385		776	517	103,814	782
1991	75,656	28,574	8,583	3,772		1,124	3,480	23,087	1,628		642	585	147,131	769
1992	93,132	34,377	12,975	3,251		1,617	5,804	25,825	10,537		313	293	188,124	902
1993	106,387	26,407	15,810	2,441		1,800	5,396	15,866	67,938		1,739	724	244,508	1,009
1994	91,385	14,912	15,051	624		1,864	4,233	6,470	47,826	1,558	391	2,012	186,326	1,154
1995	84,009	17,492	14,686	71		1,106	3,004	20,949	35,174	3,315	3,762	3,975	187,543	1,202
1996	72,734	21,042	238,121	112		1,966	3,759	8,691	66,631	2,759	5,304	4,904	211,714	1,355
1997	106,534	21,126	54,719	1,873		1,934	5,010	5,985	152,844	889	27,401	2,762	381,077	1,525
1998	158,715	25,444	38,796	6,806		1,254	7,014	4,779	551	578	21,728	2,602	267,667	1,599
1999	185,739	22,400	32,344	5,611		1,744	4,639	4,045		1,501	9,596	563	268,182	1,797
2000	144,618	594	34,034	1,433		1,010	4,637	5,258	17,237	990	11,095	1,780	222,686	1,955
2001	24,035	209	2,786	13		14	813	875	3,480	170	985	850	34,230	302
Total	1,454,645	303,495	367,920	91,444	66,343	47,226	80,414	219,533	405,736	11,760	87,583	30,912	3,166,888	20,305

* Other include countries such as Brunei, Laos, Mauritius, Spain, Lebanon, UK and USA. ** Million US \$.
Source: Siddiqui and Abrar, 2001.

One of the relevant considerations in international labor migration is the occupational background of migrant workers. In spite of repeated emphasis on the importance of exportation of skilled and professional workers, Bangladesh exports mainly the large number of semi-skilled and unskilled workers to Middle East and East and Southeast Asia (Table 3). As the data suggests, there is a decline in the proportion of professional workers over the time. In absolute terms, the number of professionals leaving the country for work abroad has increased 14.2 times between 1976 and 1999 but they accounted for only approximately 4.05 percent in 1999 as opposed to 9.3 percent in 1976. Between 1976 and 2000, 44.04 of migrant workers were unskilled and 22.07 percent was semi skilled. Thus, it is clear that the bulk of the Bangladeshi labor migrants were low-level manpower (67 per cent).

TABLE 3 . Global Flow of Bangladeshis by Skill Composition
1976-2000 (Selected Years)

Years	Professional	Skilled	Semi-skilled	Unskilled	Total
1976	568	1,775	543	3,201	6,087
1980	1,983	12,209	2,343	13,538	30,073
1985	2,568	28,225	7,823	39,078	77,694
1990	6,004	35,613	20,792	41,405	103,814
1995	6,352	59,905	32,055	89,229	187,541
1998	9,574	74,718	51,590	131,785	267,667
1999	8,045	98,449	44,947	116,741	268,182
2000 (Jan.)	202	20,853	5,515	17,791	44,361
Total	108,569	798,860	591,506	1,180,146	2,679,081

Source: Siddiqui and Abrar, 2001.

Migrants' remittance received by the Bangladesh economy has increased steadily over the years (Chart 1). The value of official remittance is 20.52 per cent of the country's annual import and 36.65 percent of annual export (Chowdhury, 1997). 29.5 per cent of the country's national savings is contributed by the remittance of migrant workers (World Bank, 1997). Based on official statistics, Bangladesh gained a total of around US 23 billion dollars as remittances from the nationals working abroad from 1976 to April 2002⁸. As part of its efforts to accelerate and encourage the remittance of foreign exchange, the government of Bangladesh opened remittance centers in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Rome, Riyadh, Dubai, UK, New York and Tokyo. Official report on yearly remittances from East and Southeast Asian countries is scant and flawed, in view of the fact that the bulk of the Bangladeshi workers remit their incomes through the informal source-*Hundi*⁹.

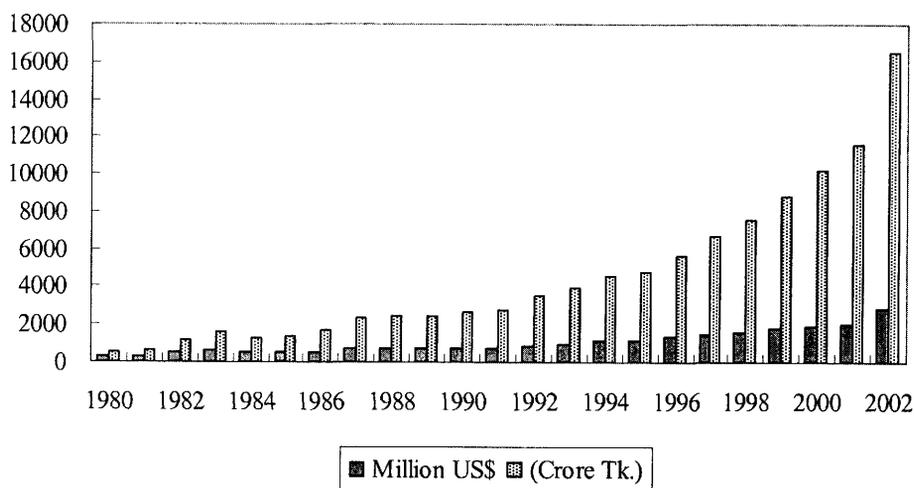
⁸ This figure is calculated from the data given in Siddiqui and Abrar, 2001 and *Asian Migration News*, 15 June 2003. Since its creation in December 1971 until 2000, Bangladesh received 36.3 billion U.S. dollars from various bilateral and multilateral sources as foreign aid. See for details "Development-Bangladesh: Foreign Aid said to only help the rich" by Tabibul Islam, IPS (Inter Press Service News Agency) 2001, http://www.oneworld.org/ips2/feb01/09_30_020.html

⁹ *Hundi* is an informal means of transfer of cash money. People who are involved in money-transferring through this informal means (*hundi-men*) do not usually charge commission and they pay higher rate than the formal means of money-transferring (e.g. Bank). The *hundi-men* collect money overseas, buy electronic goods or gold to sell back home, deliver the promised sum and make a tidy profit.

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This informal source of remittance transfer is more remunerative than the formal one (e.g. Bank). The foreign currency strapped Bangladesh has done much to encourage remittance through official channel in recent years¹⁰.

CHART 1. Yearwise Remittance from Bangladeshi Migrants from 1980-2000



Source: Data from Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Bangladesh; <http://www.probashgov.org/>

IV. GENDER AND MIGRATION

Eighty five percent of 140 million people of Bangladesh are Muslims. Its cultural norms and values inhibit female migration. While male migration is highly desirable, female migration is regarded as dishonorable for their families and *Baris*¹¹. Despite this cultural prejudice, a small number of females have entered in the international labor market mainly in the 1990s. Systematic information on women migrants is difficult to come by which is compounded by the cross-border migration to India by land. Estimates of this vary systematically. Official figure provided by BMET for the period of nine years between 1991 and 1999, suggest that there were 13,544 women who migrated to different

¹⁰ Recently, Finance Minister of Bangladesh visited several Bangladeshi manpower-receiving countries and encouraged the migrant workers to remit through formal channel.

¹¹ *Bari* is a Bengali word which denotes group of households sharing same courtyard. The members of the *Bari* are generally blood related and belong to same lineage. They take care of the prestige of *Bari* as they take care of the prestige of their households. The reputation of *Bari* depends on the action, vocation and dedication of *Bari* members which must be consistent to *Bari*'s long tradition. Heads of the households of *Bari* exercise considerable amount of control on their members to be compatible with *Bari*'s tradition. However, it does not mean that within *Bari* there is no interhousehold conflict or competition for scarce goods. There is certain level of conflict and competition among the household members, but those are resolved by amicable negotiation by heads of households in the particular *Bari*. See for details about *Bari*, Wood, 1994.

destinations of Middle East and Southeast Asia (see Siddiqui, 2001: 36). This constituted less than 1 percent of the total migration from Bangladesh. However, this figure is somewhat anecdotal. A NGO in Bangladesh reports that about 200,000 women and Children have been illegally smuggled to the Middle East in the last twenty years (Cited in GoB, 1997:27).

In November 1997, following an inter-ministerial meeting, Government of Bangladesh under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina imposed a complete ban on migration of women except those who were highly qualified professionals such as doctors, engineers, and teachers. However, in 1998, a decision was taken by the labor Ministry through a Circular¹² to lift ban on migration of all other categories of women workers, except domestic aides. However, Bangladesh has recently eased government restrictions on sending female domestic workers abroad, particularly to the Middle East¹³. The government now allows married women above age 35, to go abroad for household jobs, if accompanied by their spouses.

V. ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN MIGRATION PROCESS

In the face of globalization process, one of the reasons why the role of the state becomes crucial is its ability to control and facilitate, as in the case of Bangladesh, migration process. Channeling of labor migrants is an important aspect of the overall migration process. In the 1970s the government of Bangladesh was directly responsible for recruitment. Since 1981, as part of private sector development, the private recruiting agents took over the task. There are four channels for international migration from Bangladesh. They are BMET (Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training), BOESL (Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited), private recruiting agents, and personal initiatives assisted mainly by the kinship networks. The performance of the different channels is presented in Table 4. The data suggests that, in recent years, recruiting agents and personal initiatives are channeling the bulk of the migrants overseas. We briefly review the activities of these institutions in the migration processes (Mahmood, 1991, 1998; Siddiqui, 2001; Chowdhury, 1997; Siddiqui and Abrar, 2001; Ahmed, 1998).

The Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training (BMET) was established in 1976 under the Ministry of Labour to enhance manpower exporting to other countries. For the government's side, the BMET monitors and supervises the overall recruitment process. At present, regulation and control over the recruitment process is the most important function of BMET. It issues and renews licenses of recruiting agencies, grants permission to agencies to recruit, provides immigration clearances after verifying visa papers and employment contracts. The Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited (BOESL) deals with professional and skilled migration. The BOESL was established in 1984 to take the direct recruitment role by competing with the private recruitment agencies. The agency coordinates with the Bangladeshi missions abroad in assessing the needs of labor and puts up advertisements in newspapers for recruitment.

¹² No. BR.-13/com.-1/92 (part-1)/ 657 dated 7.10.98.

¹³ "Curbs on Sending Female Workers abroad relaxed", Gulf News, 12 April 2003.

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TABLE 4. Year-Wise Recruitment by Type of Agencies (Selected Years)

Year	BMET	BOESL	Recruiting Agents	Individual	Total
1976	5,279	0	284	528	6,091
1980	5,715	0	7,773	16,585	30,073
1985	0	1,221	39,397	37,076	77,694
1990	0	435	40,258	63,121	103,814
1995	73	627	74,921	111,922	187,543
1998	0	419	85,300	181,948	267,667
1999	0	309	110,669	157,204	268,182
2000 (Jan)	0	16	18,739	27,516	46,271
Total	42,001	8,753	1,325,649	1,578,040	2,954,443

Source: Siddiqui and Abrar, 2001.

BMET: Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training; BOESL: Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited.

Private recruiting agencies serve as important source of information for aspiring migrants. These agencies generally act as middlemen, matching the needs of foreign employers with the characteristics and abilities of workers identified in home. After taking permission from the BMET, the agencies recruit workers as per specifications of the foreign employers and then process their cases for deployment. The recruitment agencies generally depend on their own sub-agents for recruitment. At the initial stages the recruiting agencies used to receive commissions from the foreign employers for their services and as such did not charge the workers concerned. However, overtime, due to fierce competition among the sending countries and among the recruiting agencies, the arrangements have reversed and now the recruiting agencies levy a charge to the prospective workers. The recruiting agencies have organized under the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) in 1984. In 1998, the association had a membership of 475 agencies.

More than half of the overseas recruitment from Bangladesh is conducted through private initiatives. Usually persons already deployed in the receiving countries arrange visas for their friends and relatives through their own contacts. This type of arrangements has facilitated the development of strong migrant networks¹⁴ and made the migration as a self-feeding process over time. The effect of migrant networks in raising rates and probabilities of international migration has been demonstrated convincingly throughout Asia. In all of the major sending countries of Asia, migrant networks have been shown to be significant in perpetuating migration. Such is the case for the Philippines (Caces *et al.* 1985; Smart *et al.* 1986; Fawcett and Arnold, 1987; Lindquist, 1993; Goss and Lindquist, 1995), Indonesia (Hugo, 1993; 1995; Spaan, 1994), Sri Lanka (Spaan 1988, Eelens *et al.* 1991), and Thailand (Singhanetra-Renard, 1992).

¹⁴ Migrant networks are webs of interpersonal connections linking migrants and potential migrants (see for details, Massey *et al.* 1987). Migration networks consist of labor brokers, policies to promote employment abroad, and support systems to finance international migration for employment.

VI. BANGLADESHI MIGRANT WORKERS IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

In this section, we will discuss the experiences of Bangladeshi migrant workers in several Asian host countries to illustrate their conditions and to comment on the likely trends in the future. The number of Bangladeshi professionals with middle class background, who are settling down in this region permanently is few and only gradually growing. Yet, many of them when presented with an opportunity to migrate to Australia or North America quickly take advantage of such occasions. In the following discussion we focus more on the working class temporary migration in this region.

Singapore

Singapore has been one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The Singapore government since the independence in 1965 played a crucial role in the process of transforming the colonial entrepôt economy into a vibrant industrial nation. Modern Singapore is a creation of migrants who settled on the island following the establishment of a trading port by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819 (Huff, 1994; George, 1985). When Stamford Raffles came to Singapore in early 1819, the little island was no more than a fishing village, inhabited by a mere 120 Malays and about 30 Chinese (George 1985:21-58; Chiew 1983). Singapore's population crossed the four-million mark in June, 2000 comprising 18.8 percent non-residents, 7.2 percent permanent residents and 74 percent citizens¹⁵. This high rate of increase of population is often attributed to the high rate of immigration (Low, 1995, 2002; Pang, 1991, 1992).

For the 35 years between 1960 and 1995, the Singapore economy grew at an average annual rate of 8.5 percent (Wong 1997:135). The Singapore workforce, consisting of less than 1.9 million people, was able to absorb a net inflow of approximately 50,000 foreigners per year in the years from 1994 through 1997 (*The Straits Times*, 20 May 1999). Between 1980 and 1990, the annual employment growth rate was 3.4 percent. During the same period, its labor force growth rate was only 1.63 percent (Wong, 1997). According to another estimate, Singapore's economic growth between 1990 and 1998 averaged 7.9 per cent per annum (Hui, 2002). Over the same period, more than 604,000 new jobs were created against an increase of 458,000 in the domestic population and an increase of about 300,000 in the domestic labor force. Hui argued that without the inflow of foreign manpower to supplement the domestic labor force, the phenomenal growth in employment and GDP over this period would not have been possible.

¹⁵ Non-residents consist mostly of foreign workers on work permits or employment passes, foreign domestic maids, foreign students, and those on long-term social passes. The number of non-residents more than doubled from 311,264 in 1990 to 754,524 in 2000. This group made up 10.2 per cent of Singapore's total population of then 3.05 million in 1990, but swelled to make up 18.8 per cent of the present population of 4.02 million. The number of permanent residents more than doubled in the last 10 years, to 290,118 from 112,132. PRs make up 7.2 per cent of Singapore's population, compared to 3.7 per cent a decade ago. The number of Singapore citizens grew by just around 350,000 in 10 years, to 2.97 million. In relative terms, this group now accounts for just 74 percent of the total population, down from 86.1 per cent in 1990, "Singapore Population Crosses 4 Million Mark", *Business Times*, Singapore, 1 September, 2000.

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According to one estimate, the proportion of foreign workforce compared to local labor force was 30 percent (Yeoh et al., 1999). This proportion is projected to increase up to 35.5 per cent in 2005 and 43.9 per cent in 2010 (Lum, 1995:61). By far the majority of the foreigners who are employed in Singapore fall in the category of manual workers (especially construction workers) or domestic workers. Bangladeshi migrant workers fall in this R-pass category. The total number of foreign workers in this category was reported to be more than 450,000 in 1999¹⁶ and 490,000 in 2002 (Hui, 2002). Since the wages for these jobs are very low and the work is often difficult, dangerous and demeaning, these occupations are shunned by most Singaporeans. R Pass holders are not allowed to bring in their immediate family members. They are also subject to security bond and medical examination requirements. In addition, the employers must post a SG\$5,000 security bond with the government to guarantee the good behaviour and eventual repatriation each foreign manual worker.

Singapore is a major receiving country for Bangladeshi migrant workers. To the Bangladeshis, Singapore is a 'land of opportunity' and a preferred destination for several reasons, namely higher earnings, systematic foreign worker recruitment policy, legal protection, modern life styles and last but not least, the establishment of migration networks over time. Largely, all these factors have induced them to search for a better life in Singapore. Chart 2 presents the trend and level of Bangladeshi labor migration to Singapore. There are approximately 50,000¹⁷ Bangladeshi migrants in Singapore in any given year since the mid 1990s.

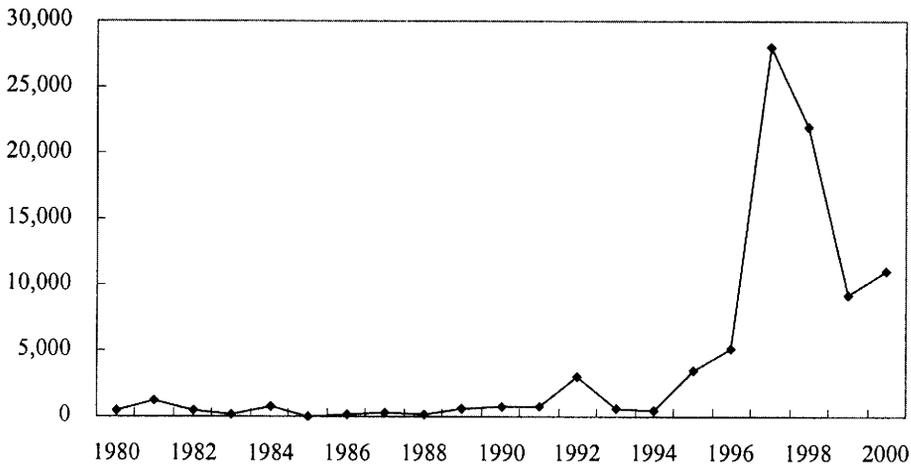
Both the recruiting agents and migrant brokers play complementary role in the recruitment of prospective migrant workers. A prospective migrant needs an IP (In-Principle Approval) from the Ministry of Manpower in Singapore to emigrate. Companies in Singapore apply for the IPs. The IP is issued on the basis of genuine need for foreign workers. IPs are obtained for prospective migrants in Bangladesh with the assistance of both the recruiting agents (national level recruiting agents in Bangladesh) and the migrant brokers (in Singapore). Recruiting agents and migrant brokers employ brokers at the villages in Bangladesh to convince the prospective migrants. These local brokers collect fees on behalf of the national recruiting agents or migrant brokers to initiate the recruitment process. Local brokers get a fixed commission for his work which usually ranges from 5 to 10 per cent of the total cost of migration. Generally, local agents collect fees from as many prospective migrants as they can. As a result the demand for IPs usually exceeds supply. This leads to a situation where some of the prospective migrants are successful while others are not. Prospective migrants who fail in the first

¹⁶ Straits Times, May 20, 1999, "Adding Manpower to Singapore's Engine"

¹⁷ The actual number of Bangladeshi migrants in Singapore is not available from the Bangladeshi source because of the lack of sophisticated mechanisms in maintaining records of returnees. The total number of Bangladeshi workers is also not available from the Singapore source. We used published material and personal observation to guess the total number of Bangladeshi migrant population in Singapore. Official figure shows that the construction sector hired around 200,000 foreign workers in 1999. It is usually believed that a high proportion of the unskilled construction workers are Bangladeshis. Thirdly, news paper reporting is considered, like "Every year, about 70,000 foreign construction workers come to Singapore, mainly from Bangladesh, India and Thailand" or "Every year, more than 30,000 Bangladeshi workers sell their land and cattle, and borrow money so that they can come here (Singapore)" (18 December 1999, "The Journey of Hope", *The Straits Times*). We, therefore, estimate that there would be around 50,000 Bangladeshi migrants in Singapore in a given year since the mid 1990s.

round wait for the second round. Such a system exposes them to uncertainties and exploitation (Rahman, 2000).

CHART 2. Growth of Bangladeshi Workers in Singapore (1980-2000)



Source: Rahman, 2000.

A prospective migrant worker spends between around 200,000 and 250,000 Taka (US\$ 4,000 and 5,000; US\$ 1= BDT 50 in the late 1990s) to migrate to Singapore with a two-year contract. This vast amount of cash is not easily affordable for rural families who are mostly poor and live at a subsistence level. The financial burden often involved the loss or mortgage of valuable property of households. Most migrant workers from Bangladesh are mainly employed in the construction sector and some find jobs in the service and maintenance sectors. Generally they are put to work as laborers, cleaners, waiters, and general assistants or in semi-skilled occupations (in construction and manufacturing sector). Migrant workers live in dormitories as well as at worksites (mainly construction worksites). Singapore is largely free from the problem of undocumented migration. However, there are few cases of missing of Bangladeshi workers because of the premature cancellation of work-permits. Workers often blame the dishonest labor-suppliers¹⁸ for such occurrences.

Usually, a migrant worker earns between SG\$500 and 1000 (about US\$300 to 600) per month. Some of the workers are able to save two-thirds of their earnings. Generally, migrant workers receive free medical care when they are sick. Some companies offer medical leave also. However, there are some irregularities in this regard. Foreign workers who are under direct employers enjoy special privileges in Singapore. Direct employers usually open bank account for their foreign employees and pay salaries directly to their

¹⁸ Bangladeshi migrant workers categorize employers into two groups –direct employer and indirect employer. Direct employers hire the workers from overseas and employ them under their direct supervision. Indirect employers are actually labor-suppliers. They supply foreign workers to different companies on demand. Bangladeshi migrant workers often complain against these labor-suppliers. Migrants prefer to come under direct employers because they are usually treated better under direct employer.

bank accounts. They provide regular work and pay for overtime work which is usually double than their basic daily wages. Despite the heavy cost of migration, Singapore is a much sought after destination for Bangladeshi migrants because the risk and uncertainty of such an undertaking is minimal. Temporary migration to the island does yield material and social benefits for a significant number.

About four hundred Bangladeshi professional families live in Singapore. They represent a wide spectrum of professions such as teaching in tertiary institutions, ship captains, marine engineers, engineers, architects and business professionals. Many of them are citizens or permanent residents. A good proportion of them use Singapore as a launching pad for eventual migration to Australia or North America. In recent years, a number of Bangladeshi engineers have migrated to Canada.

Malaysia

Malaysia reflects the complexity of international migration, in that it both imports and exports labor – the only ASEAN country which has traditionally done both (Pillai, 2000:137). Malaysian forms the largest group of foreign workers in Singapore. For example, Malaysia has 250,000 workers abroad, about 200,000 of them in Singapore including 50,000 who commute daily across the causeway (*The Business Asia*, 2 June 1997). Foreign migrant workers began entering Malaysia in the 1970s because of the New Economic Policy's (1971-1990) efforts to restructure the economy and society and of the international relocation of manufacturing industries (Kassim, 1998, 1999; Chin, 2002; Pillai, 2000; Chan and Abdullah, 1999; Abdullah and Chan, 2000). However, state acknowledge of the need for foreign migrant labor began during the mid 1980s in response to the growing numbers of undocumented workers. By 1991, the newly formed Cabinet Committee on Foreign Workers implemented a five-year policy on what were called 'guest' or 'non-traditional source' workers (Chin, 2002).

The policy included measures ensuring that employers offer wages and benefits equal to those of local employees and that employers pay levies for each foreign worker. Initially, agriplantation and construction employers were allowed officially to hire migrants. However, later other industries like manufacturing and services were allowed to hire foreign workers. Non-government organizations (NGOs) and trade unions claim that numbers of foreign workers are as high as 2 or 3 million (Pillai, 1998). Just before the Asian Financial Crisis, there were 1.7 million migrants, of whom about 700,000 were documented (*The New Straits Times*, 15 November 1996). In July 2001, there were over 807,000 legally employed semi-unskilled foreign workers in Malaysia (Kassim, 2002:328). The number seems to have declined by 45 percent between 1997 and 2000 due largely to measures taken by the government to reduce foreign workers in the wake of the Financial Crisis in 1997 (Kassim, 2002).

Malaysia is hosting a large number of illegal migrant workers (Wong and Teuku Anwar, 2003). Malaysia has about a million irregular immigrants, mostly from Indonesia (*Asian Migration News*, 30 June 2002). The term 'illegal immigrant' as officially defined in Malaysia, refers to over-stayers, contract defaulters, pass abusers, undocumented workers and their non-working retainers. According to one estimate, over 2.25 million illegal aliens have been identified and apprehended under the various programs and operations carried out by the relevant authorities between 1992 and 2001 (Kassim, 2002). Malaysia has passed new the Immigration Act 2002, which imposes severe penalty on irregular migrants. Under the new law, migrants without proper documents are subject to

a maximum fine of RM 10,000 (US \$ 1= 3.79 Malaysian Ringgit), up to five years imprisonment, and six lashes with a cane; for those protecting or harboring irregular migrants, the penalty is a maximum fine of RM 50,000, up to five years in jail, and six lashes (Battistella and Asis, 2003:18).

Malaysia vacillates between leniency and stringency on control of migration flows (Rajamoorthy, 1999). For example, in 1997, Malaysia halted the issuance of new work permits and renewals, and to repatriate workers in the hardest hit sectors of construction and services. It was announced that approximately 200,000 migrant workers, mostly in construction, were likely to be laid off by 1998, as permits for 700,000 migrant workers in the construction and services sectors would not be renewed at the expiration month of August 1998 (Chin, 2002). By mid-1998, however, the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Workers announced that permission would be given to 60 agriplantation companies to employ 200,000 'fresh' migrant workers and 20,000 redeployed migrant workers as it was revealed that RM 2 billion had been lost in 1997 because of labor shortage (Chin, 2002). However, over the long term, the prospects of higher levels of immigration are even greater¹⁹.

Approximately half million Bangladeshi migrants visited Malaysia between the late 1980s and 1997 (Siddiqui, 2001) and they worked mainly in the agriplantation, manufacturing and construction industries (Table 2). In 1992, Malaysia entered into an agreement with Bangladesh for the systematic transfer of labor on a large scale (Abul-Aziz, 2001). Hence, the Bangladesh-to-Malaysia labor movement was augmented from that year onwards. In 1994, Malaysia entered into another agreement with Bangladesh for the annual importation of 50,000 workers, mostly for the construction industry (Ahmed, 1998). Between 1992 and 1998, 307,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers were issued work permits for work in Malaysia (Athukorala and Manning, 1999: 177). According to another estimate, there were 307,695 Bangladeshi migrants in 1997 and 224,609 in 1998²⁰. As of February 2000, authorized migrant workers were estimated to be 697,219, of which, Bangladeshis were 129,004²¹.

17,237 Bangladeshis legally went to Malaysia for work in 2000 and according to official data, at least 100,000 legal Bangladeshis worked in Malaysia as of the end of 2000 (*Asian Migration News*, 28 February 2001). However, if we include documented and undocumented Bangladeshi migrants, the number may be as high as 250,000²². The financial cost of migration to Malaysia is between around 80,000 and 150,000 Taka (about US\$ 1500 to 3000). According to one study conducted by Karim et al. (1999: 48), a Bangladeshi migrant earned up to RM 700 in a month (mean income, RM 484; approximately US \$ 130). The data suggests that they can hardly get back their economic cost of migration within the two-year contract period. There is no doubt that 'migration

¹⁹ Based on 'Vision 2020', Malaysia's population will be about 33 million, with 18.7 million jobs but only 12.5 million employable Malaysian workers by 2020 (Mier, 1992). Obviously, to sustain economic growth foreigners will have to make up for the shortfall.

²⁰ Source: Asian Migration Atlas, <http://www.scalabrini.asn.au/atlas/amatlas.htm>.

²¹ Asian Migration Atlas, Malaysia section, 2000.

²² After a careful consideration of BMET data, data found in several issues in *Asian Migration News* and in published materials (books and journal articles), and personal observation, we have come into conclusion that there are around 250,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers including documented and undocumented in Malaysia.

industry'²³ plays a dominant role in the migration process. However, different interest groups in 'migration industry' often indulge in the malpractices that lead to victimization of prospective migrants²⁴.

Several problems that Bangladeshis encounter in Malaysia are language barriers, lack of health and medical facilities, lack of interaction with the community and society, inadequate housing and most important, living in constant fear of law especially this is true for illegal migrant workers (see for details, Abdul-Aziz, 2001; Karim et al., 1999; Rudnick, 1996; Sabur, 1997:). A study conducted by Anja Rudnick (1996) reveals that working and living conditions as well as the state of mind of Bangladeshi workers contrast sharply with employers' satisfaction with their Bangladeshi workers (Rudnick, 1996). Rudnick notes that Bangladesh workers in four of the five factories studied were deprived of their right to equal treatment and wages, as required by Malaysian law. The Bangladeshis earned approximately half of what they had been promised by their agencies back home. The majority of the Bangladeshis stressed that they would not have come to Malaysia if they had known about the actual payments and working conditions beforehand.

There are allegations that Bangladeshi legal migrants largely disappear from their sponsored-employers to work illegally elsewhere for better payment in Malaysia. We would argue, the problem of illegal immigrant workers cannot be solved without tackling the gross exploitation and unfair treatment of legal migrant workers. Ishida and Hassan (2000) in their work on Bangladeshi labor migration to Malaysia showed why temporary migrants intend to extend their stay in Malaysia. Statistical analysis reveals that the lower real remittances fall below the expected amounts, and the lower real wages are, compared with passage and mediation fees, the more will wish to extend their stay. These facts imply that if future Bangladeshi migrant workers to Malaysia have the correct information about income levels and living expenses in Malaysia, and hence mediation and passage fees become cheaper, the likelihood of their intending to extend their stays will be much lower.

South Korea

Among Asian labor receiving countries, South Korea was a major source country for workers migrating to Gulf oil countries in the 1970s, but rapidly became a labor importer due to rapid economic growth in the 1980s (Martin, 1996; Uh, 1999; Park, 2000). In the late 1980s, the migrant workers came voluntarily to Korea on short-term visas and began working illegally in domestic firms which was suffering from severe labor shortage. To ease the labor shortage, the government began a 'Foreigners Industrial Training Programme (FITP)' in 1991. Similar program was established in Japan in 1981²⁵. South Korea's program, which was modeled on Japan's and expanded in 1993, was established

²³ A whole network of middlemen and recruitment agents has over the years 'institutionalized' the movement and contributed to the growth of what has been called the 'immigration industry' (Hugo, 1993:57; Castles and Miller 1998).

²⁴ For example, an estimated 2,860 Bangladeshi nationals are languishing in 28 countries' jails. Most of them were jailed for faulty papers by labor exporters (30 November 2002, *Asian Migration News*). Most recent report reveals that more than 5,000 Bangladeshis are currently in jail in 60 countries. Of this number, only 200 were convicted of crimes, while the rest are being detained for immigration offenses (15 June 2003, *Asian Migration News*).

²⁵ This is discussed later in the country case of Japan.

ostensibly to offer skills training to foreign nationals already employed by Korean companies overseas. But actually foreign workers were brought in and employed in domestic firms (Lee, 1994).

According to Won-Woo Park (2002), there are three types of migrant workers in South Korea: legally admitted migrant worker, undocumented worker and industrial trainee. Most of those with legal work visas are engaged in foreign language related jobs or in the arts related professions. The second category is undocumented workers. Undocumented workers are usually those who stayed in the country over 91 days or who changed their sponsored employers. As of December 2002, there were 361,000 migrant workers in the country. Of the total, only 72,000 or 19.9 percent had legal status, while 289,000 or 81.1 per cent were illegal foreign workers (*Asian Migration News*, January 31, 2003).

The industrial trainees are not recognized as ‘workers’ under the Labor Standards Act. After receiving about one week of education and training, they start work. In reality, Korea has used the trainee status as a short cut to admit migrant workers. By June 1996, Korea had hosted about 57,000 such trainees (Lee, 1997). The number of trainees peaked at 90,000 by the end of 1997. However, due to economic crisis in 1997, the number declined sharply for the year 1998. The number started to increase again in 1999 in response to the quick recovery from the crisis. In 1999 and 2000, 98,400 and 104,800 trainees come to Korea (OECD, 2000:211). Critics have pointed out that the trainee system allows for the exploitation of all unskilled foreign workers because as trainees (as opposed to workers), individuals are not covered by country’s labor laws (Lee, 1997).

Many of the ‘trainees’, who left the workplace, began to work illegally for higher pay (for details, see Moon, 2002). In 1994, the basic monthly wage for trainees was between US \$ 200 and \$260, while that of illegal workers was about \$500 (Moon, 2000: 149). According to the Labor Ministry, by October 1997, 34 percent of trainees had abandoned their authorized place of employment, and 26,600 of the 78,000 trainees admitted since 1993 had reneged on their work contracts (Moon, 2000:149). Undocumented migrants work in textiles, metal assembly, machinery parts, chemical and plastic, construction, wholesale and retail, hotels and restaurants, and other labor-intensive industries. Some changes have taken place in last few years. From April 2000, the government introduced a work permit to allow industrial trainees to work for a certain period of time after their two-year training. However, a systematic migrant worker program is yet to be developed.

Bangladeshi migrants started migrating to South Korea from the early 1990s under “Foreigners Industrial Training Programme (FITP). According to BMET source, only 11,760 workers went to South Korean for work from 1994 to 2000. However, the cumulative figure for Bangladeshi over-stayers between 1992 and 2000 was 69,600 (Table 5). We estimate that there will be around 40,000 Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea at present²⁶. To migrate under FITP, a migrant paid usually between 100,000 and 180,000 Taka (about US \$ 2,000 to 3,500). From the beginning of labor migration to Korea, recruitment procedure was monopolized by four recruiting agents in Bangladesh. This received public concern in the early 1990s. Probably, this high cost of migration was resulted from their malpractices.

²⁶ After a careful consideration of BMET data, data found in several issues in *Asian Migration News*, data from Ministry of Justice, Korea, and personal observation, we have come into conclusion that there are around 40,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers in South Korea.

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TABEL5 . Estimates of the Number of Bangladeshi Over-stayers in Korea

Years	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Numbers	1,500	5,900	5,200	5,500	9,600	9,000	7,500	10,900	14,500

Source: Ministry of Justice, South Korea; adopted from OECD, 1999:164 and OECD, 2000:211.

Bangladeshi workers, who went under FITP program, were largely unhappy with the employers in training centers. Dissatisfaction with the employers at the training places over salaries led them mainly to take up irregular employment. Undocumented migrants use brokers to get work. These brokers usually charge one month salary for their service. An illegal Bangladeshi migrant worker usually earns between US\$ 400 and 600 (around KRW 450,000 to 650,000; US \$ 1= KRW 1,166) per month depending on overtime payment and sectors of economy (e.g. manufacture, construction). Apart from FITP, a large number of Bangladeshis visited South Korea on short-term visit visas and overstayed for illegal employment²⁷. This type of illegal migration to South Korea was cheap as migrants did not pay fees to recruiting agents. However, many of them encountered ill-fate when immigration officers at international airports in Korea denied short-term visa on arrival and forced many of them to return home. Undocumented migrant workers in Korea are exposed to grave uncertainties and even physical abuse by their employers²⁸.

The recent news reveals that the Korean Federation of Small and Medium Business will push to reduce the number of foreign countries allowed to send workers to Korea from current 20 countries to five or six, including China, Indonesia and the Philippines (*Asian Migration News*, January 31, 2003.). This will be disastrous for Bangladeshis. Bangladesh may lose the opportunity of exporting its manpower to South Korea if the active diplomatic effort is not made soon.

Japan

Japan was unique among the advanced industrial nations in that it managed to develop without relying on foreign workers at the initial stage of development²⁹ (Athukorala and Manning, 1999: 27). Around 1980 the net annual inflow of foreigners started to increase (Nagayama, 1996; Yamanaka, 1993). However, the new annual inflow increased remarkably after 1985. The number of foreigners registered in Japan, as of December 31, 2002, was 1,851,758, an increase of about 600,000 over the 1990's figure (*Asian Migration News*, June, 2003). The immigration Bureau estimated that there are 740,000 foreign workers in Japan, accounting for 1.4 per cent of the country's labor force (*Asian Migration News*, 30 April, 2003). In 2000, 250,000 foreigners overstayed their visas (Japan Immigration Association, 2001). Foreign workers in Japan can be divided into two groups: legal and illegal.

Legal foreign workers consist of Japan-born Koreans and Chinese (Zainicbi Gaikokujin), foreign-born Japanese (Nikkeijin), and trainees and entertainers from Asia. Most trainees come from China, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines (Iguchi, 2002).

²⁷ Bangladeshis are not required to have visa prior to their journey to South Korea. Visa is issued upon arrival.

²⁸ Based on interviews of migrant workers in 2001.

²⁹ This is different from the experiences of Western Europe.

From the government's perspective, the ostensible purpose of the trainee program is to spread technical and managerial skills that would be useful in the local management of offices, factories and joint ventures of Japanese companies abroad. In reality, trainees rarely receive 'training' instead they work at inferior, temporary positions in industrial niches not occupied by Japanese. As 'trainees' are not considered 'workers', they are not protected under Japanese labor laws (Terasawa, 2000). Inadequate training and low financial allowances have caused many foreign trainees to abandon their employers and find work themselves as illegal foreign workers with higher wages (Goodman et al. 2003). We have seen the similar trend in South Korea.

Illegal migrant workers are those who overstay beyond their visas, leave the formal employers as trainees, work without legal permission as in the case of students or enter Japan with forged passports or by other illegal methods³⁰. These workers usually come from Asian countries, particularly, East Asian men and women and South Asian and Iranian men. As of January 1, 2001, there were about 230,000 overstaying persons in Japan, which is down from approximately 300,000 persons in 1993. According to one estimate, about 619,000 newly-arrived Asian foreigners registered at the end of 1999, while another 252,000 were overstaying their visas (Shipper, 2002:46). Usually, immigration officials apprehend an estimated 40,000 to 60,000 illegal foreign workers annually. Therefore, it is obvious that authorities are fairly lenient to illegal workers. Several scholars in Japan have dealt with irregular migration (see, Spencer, 1992; Nagayama, 1992; Morita and Sassen, 1994; Yamanaka, 1993; Shimada, 1994; Mori, 1995, 1996; Okunishi and Sano, 1995; Weiner and Hanami, 1997). Basically, they concluded that 'irregular migration in Japan stemmed from an immigration policy that does not address the demands for Japan's tight labor market' (Battistella and Asis, 2003: 51).

Japanese small businesses prefer to hire illegal foreign workers because they are then not obligated to pay health insurance premiums – a great saving for the company (Shipper, 2002). While some sectors oppose the increase of immigration, business associations, and people in general have become more favorable to it. A nationwide survey conducted by *Asahi Shimbun* in September 2002³¹, found that 64 percent of respondents were in favor of admitting unskilled foreign workers, an increase of 8 percent over a similar survey conducted in 1989. As for irregular workers already in Japan, while 46 percent declared they should be caught and deported, 36 percent were in favor of regularizing their stay. Although 64 percent were in favor of providing migrants with social services, 60 percent were not in favor of increasing taxes to pay for such services. According to UN study, to sustain Japan's economy at the 1995 level Japan will need to import 33 million workers in the next 50 years, or approximately 660,000 every year³². In spite of pressure from different groups, Japan's immigration policy has not changed much to hire migrant workers under work permit program.

Due to the absence of any formal recruitment procedures, Bangladeshi migrants entered Japan as 'temporary visitors' and overstayed their visas. There were no visa requirements for Bangladeshis before 1989. Most of the Bangladeshi migrants entered Japan before the imposition of visa requirement in 1989. Usually, they used Thailand or Singapore as springboards for migration to Japan. According to Mahmood (1994),

³⁰ Japan Immigration Association, 2001.

³¹ <http://www.scalabrini.asn.au/atlas/japan00.htm>

³² See details of UN study, <http://www.scalabrini.asn.au/atlas/japan00.htm>.

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between 1985 and 1990, 33,573 Bangladeshi entered Japan. According to another estimate, between 1990 and 1998, the cumulative figure for Bangladeshi over-stayers was 63,170 (Table 6). Table 7 shows that 5,078 Bangladeshi over-stayers were deported between 1996 and 2000. At present, there are about 15,000 Bangladeshi migrants in Japan³³. In recent years, Bangladeshis generally visit Japan on valid short-term visit visas and later many of them overstay. At the initial stage (before 1989), the financial cost of migration was not very high. Usually, the potential migrants paid air tickets only.

A prospective migrant pays a very large amount of money to brokers for preparing legal documents for visa procedures. Brokers who have usually living and working experiences in Japan provide necessary papers for visa. They charge as high as US\$ 20,000 per person for their services. Sometimes potential migrants are cheated. There are some cases in which potential migrants had visa for Japan but could not enter Japan. On arrival in Japan, immigration officers at airport suspected their motivation for migration and deported them. Interestingly, high wages in Japan, which is more than ten times higher than the wages in Bangladesh, dictated even middle class Bangladeshis (in one case a banker in Bangladeshi migrated to Japan and worked there for few years and came back home with a huge amount of cash) and such cases are rare in other countries in this region.

TABLE 6. Overstaying Bangladeshis in Japan

Years	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Male	7,195	7,807	8,161	7,931	7,295	6,836	6,500	5,864	5,581	4,625
Female	65	82	114	144	166	194	222	244	255	

Source: <http://www.scalabrini.asn.au/atlas/data/Japan3.htm>. Watanabe, 1998: 246; Iguchi, 2002:127.

TABLE 7. Number of Deported Bangladeshi Unauthorized Workers in Japan

Years	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Numbers	926	930	1,082	1,073	1,073

Source: Kondo, 2002:427.

Bangladeshi illegal migrants usually work in construction, manufacture and service sectors. They are largely from good socio-economic backgrounds (Mahmood, 1994). Some of them have also married Japanese girls (about international marriage, see Piper, 2002). However, most of the cases these marriages are unregistered as they cannot register marriage when they are on illegal status and claim special privileges as spouses of Japanese citizens. Bangladeshis in Japan are obliged to rely on informal channels, finding out jobs through recruiting agents, brokers, or friends. These 'middle people' take advantage of the workers' illegal status by taking dispatching fees from them without securing them a job. In general, a migrant earn between US\$ 1,000 and 2,000 per month (JPY about 100,000 to 200,000) if he has a regular work. Some migrants are seen engaged in businesses as well. As illegal workers they are mostly deprived of many legal protections. As most public welfare services are closed to them, illegal workers live in Japan without health insurance and must pay all medical costs themselves.

³³ After a careful consideration of BMET data, data found in several issues in *Asian Migration News* and published materials (books and journals), data from Ministry of Justice, Japan, and personal observation, We have come into conclusion that there are around 15,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers including documented and undocumented in Japan.

Bangladeshis in Japan go through the painful process of adjustment. Several problems that Bangladeshis encounter in Japan are lack of health and medical facilities, lack of interaction with the community and society, inadequate housing and most important, living in constant fear of law. A large number of migrants are in Japan for more than a decade. They miss their relatives and friends incredibly. Particularly, some married migrants who had even children in Bangladesh experienced dissolve of their marriages. Some of them have even lost their parents but could not attend their last rituals because of the fear that they would not be able to return Japan for work. Many of the migrants reported that if there was a temporary migration arrangement for them, they would not think of living in Japan for indefinite time. As they have already acculturated to the main stream Japanese culture, they hardly pose any threat to the society.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Recent trends of migration from Bangladesh reflect some of the contradictions and tensions of the multifaceted processes of globalization. Middle class Bangladeshis are keen to migrate to North America and Australia using a variety of methods. In order to counter the accusation of “brain-drain” USA has introduced Diversity Visa or D-Visa for short. These visas are given on the basis of lottery. Many working class Bangladeshis have availed themselves of this opportunity and were able to migrate to the United States in recent years. The working class Bangladeshis are still eager to go to Southeast and East Asia as well as the Middle East. The poorest of the poor who are unable to mobilize funds to undertake long distance migration spill over into neighboring India and through India into Pakistan. A large number of crooks and corrupt businessmen make – often with complicity of government officials – a fortune at the expense of the poor peasants and other working class Bangladeshis. Some of the sinister trends in migration can be seen in the increase in trafficking of women and children from Bangladesh. Many of the Bangladeshi women are forced or tricked in to the profession of prostitution in the brothels of Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and Karachi. According to one study, there are 4,000 Bangladesh-born prostitutes in Sonagachi, the infamous Calcutta’s red-light district (Akhter and Simu, 2001:9). Many of the girls who end up as prostitutes are often bought in Bangladesh and smuggled into India with which Bangladesh shares 4,000 kilometers of highly porous borders. Many of the poor Bangladeshi men and women migrate to India and Pakistan illegally to work as domestic servants. According to one estimate there are several thousand Bangladeshi servants in Karachi alone. A newspaper report estimated that about four hundred women and children are smuggled out of Bangladesh every month (Akhter and Simu, 2001:102). According to a report in the *Economist*, over 1600 Bangladeshi children have been smuggled to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to become camel jockeys in the last decade. According to this report: “Young South Asian Boys, sold for as little as \$75, are riders of choice for this popular sport. Many are deprived of food and sleep, to keep their weight down. Tiny jockeys, some less than five years old, are strapped to their mounts to avoid deadly falls, but accidents are common (*The Economist*, August 31, 2002:50).

In recent years, Non-Governmental Organizations and activists/academics of Bangladesh have played a key role in combating the menace of human trafficking. Ubniq, Ain Salishi Kendro, Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, and other local NGOs have been active in creating an awareness about this problem. Bangladesh

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National Women's Lawyers Association, an organization involved in rescuing trafficked victims, puts the yearly figure of trafficked women and children at 10,000 (Firoze, 1997). UBINIG, another NGO, stresses that approximately there are together 200,000 Bangladeshi women stranded in Pakistan who are victims of trafficking (GoB, 1997). A report published in *Asian Migration Trail*³⁴ suggests that, despite the official ban on female migration from Bangladesh, around 45,000 Bangladeshi women left to work illegally in Persian Gulf countries between 1998 and 2001. A recent report suggests that some 20,000 Bangladeshi women and children are trafficked yearly to major cities in India, Pakistan and the Middle East, and end up as prostitutes, domestic workers, camel jockeys, and beggars³⁵. Although one may question the accuracy of figures quoted with regard to trafficking, it is perhaps safe to assume that the number is quite significant. More cooperation among the countries of the region in the form of inter-government cooperation under the organization of South Asian Association of Countries (SAARC) may play a role in halting this deadly trade. Corruption-ridden Bangladesh government has proved itself to be hopelessly incompetent in protecting the rights of the women and children. More international cooperation and assistance as well as a growing awareness internally may help fight this problem.

However, on the whole the labor-surplus Bangladesh continues to export labor to fuel economic development in rapidly growing parts of Asia and the Middle East and hopefully as many of these workers with overseas experience and a new attitude will return home they will play a key role in the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. What Bangladesh needs a better management of these resources on the one hand and protection of their interests as well as effective governance in protecting the cruel exploitation of women and children from the predators.

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³⁴ <http://www.ipsnews.net/migration/stories/ban.html>.

³⁵ The Daily Star, 2 June, 2003 "20,000 women, children trafficked abroad a year."

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